

Castle: Compromise Reform Package Falls Short -- July 31, 2007

Washington, D.C. -- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle today supported a long overdue lobby reform compromise package in response to current gaps in the House and Senate ethics and lobbying rules and laws, which were exposed in recent corruption scandals. The legislation consolidates earlier House and Senate bills (H.R. 2316 and S. 1), which hit a roadblock when efforts to begin conference negotiations was blocked in the Senate.

The bill requires campaign committees to disclose "bundled" contributions by lobbyists in excess of \$15,000 in a six-month period, requiring such disclosure be made publicly available; doubles to two years, for the Senate only, the "revolving door" period during which senators would be prohibited from lobbying their former colleagues, while unfortunately maintaining the current one-year ban for the House; requires quarterly reports from lobbyists on their lobbying activities; denies congressional pensions to members convicted of certain felonies; makes changes to House and Senate rules to impose new earmark disclosure requirements in the Senate; bars members from negotiating for post-congressional employment without disclosure to ethics committees.

The measure also includes a provision Rep. Castle authored to establish a sense of the Congress that a lobbyist who is an immediate family member of a Member of Congress cannot use that relationship to gain access or advantage.

"I am pleased that the House and Senate have come to an agreement over changes to House and Senate ethics and lobbying rules and laws, and while I believe this bill takes us in the right direction by building on the changes made to the House Rules earlier this year, it falls short in several areas. The same two-year revolving door for Senators should also be included for members of the House. In addition, we must establish an outside investigatory body for ethics violations in the House of Representatives.

"Our Ethics Committee has failed us. Events in Washington, D.C. between lobbyists and lawmakers have highlighted several areas of weakness in our current system. While the blame for current ethics violations lies with both parties, it is now time to strengthen our process for ethics education and oversight. I believe we can only do this by establishing a Commission on Investigations, independent from Congress.

"Passage of the compromise agreement today builds on the passage of House Rules changes in January, but it is now time to consider step three -- the creation of an outside and independent Commission.

"I believe it is our responsibility to close the gaps in our rules and laws that have been exposed and to restore the confidence of the American people in their

elected officials. It must be clear that we are here to put the public interest above the special interests," said Castle.

Provisions

Rep. Castle believes would have strengthened the bill:

- Establish an outside and independent Investigations Commission to review ethics violations. This is a component of his bill, the Accountability and Transparency in Ethics Act (H.R. 97), which he sponsored earlier this year.
- Require 8-hour ethics training for lobbyists. Builds on Castle amendment requiring ethics training for members and staff that is now required. An amendment to require this was adopted by the House in the 109th Congress.
- Require the same two-year "cooling off" period for House members as is required in the bill for Senators. A two-year prohibition was originally in the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, including in the Democratic motion to recommit that many members supported in the 109th Congress.
- Prohibit the conversion of campaign funds to family or personal use by prohibiting the payment of campaign money to spouses except for nominal reimbursements. This provision passed the House separately in H.R. 2630 and should be expanded to include immediate family members too.

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